

How Did Eminem's 'Recovery' Have Such A Big Debut?

Rapper's more mature style appears to have appealed to wide audience, experts say.

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June 30, 2010 / 3:47 PM

At this point, we're used to [article id="1642712"]Eminem debuting at #1[/article]. After all, he's done it six times in a row, including two records that sold more than 1 million copies in their first week on the charts.

But following last year's comeback album, [article id="1612196"]*Relapse*[/article] which sold nearly 2 million copies despite [article id="1638048"]Em admitting that it was not his finest hour[/article], it wasn't a lock that *Recovery* would be greeted with the same instant success as the Detroit rapper's previous work. There were the fans who were turned off by the weird accents he adopted on *Relapse*, the dark, gory vibe of the campaign promoting that album and the overall grim nature of the music, not to mention the lack of a breakout, signature hit.

And while *Relapse* did very solid business its first week out, with sales topping 608,000, even some experts were surprised when [article id="1642738"]*Recovery* snagged the year's highest debut to date[/article], with sales of 741,000 after initial projections had it in the 500,000-600,000 range. In a music industry starved for hits, *Recovery* became only the third album since 2008 to debut with more than 700,000 copies sold.

So how did Eminem do it again? Chalk it up to a killer first single, some clever promotional gimmicks, more visibility for the rapper and a mature attitude that may have broadened his fanbase after a dozen years in the game.

"I think for him, [i>Relapse] didn't connect with his fans the way he wanted it to, so he wasn't happy with that," Eminem's manager, Paul Rosenberg, told [The Detroit News](#) on Tuesday. "*Recovery* offers more of an emotional connection for listeners. ... I think Em made the kind of album that people were waiting for with *Recovery*."

From a jokey [article id="1641652"]viral campaign featuring the ShamWow guy[/article], appearances on "The Soup," [article id="1642390"]"The Late Show With David Letterman,"[/article] the [article id="1642471"]BET Awards[/article] and "[Late Night With Jimmy Fallon](#)" and a one-page profile in the [article id="1641778"]*New York Times* Sunday magazine[/article], in which he came out in favor of gay marriage, Eminem has done more press and appearances in the past month for the new album than he did for almost the entire *Relapse* cycle. The heightened exposure from the typically reclusive rapper has clearly helped keep his name in the news and might have boosted sales.

"We sold a ton more of it than the last time," said Carl Mello, director of purchasing for the 28-store Newbury Comics chain of record stores. "Which is always a surprise in these days, with trends being the way they are." Mello chalked the big first week up to more crossover airplay and the album's first single, "Not Afraid," which he thinks brought more people into the store to buy the album. "On the last one, he would have a single and it would go top five and then disappear. On this one, they actually played it on the radio and there was definitely some anticipation for it."

Mello said the album did much better than he expected in the Newbury stores and had the kind of crossover appeal the rapper hasn't shown since his heyday in the early 2000s.

The album didn't appear to be affected by [article id="1641008"]leaking two weeks early[/article] and, as the *News* noted, it was the first of Em's records not to announce itself with a pop-culture-skewering first single like "My Name Is," "The Real Slim Shady," "Just Lose It" and "We Made You."

As he typically does, Em offered cryptic details at first about the disc, tweeting in mid-April that he'd [article id="1636124"]tossed the planned *Relapse 2* album[/article] to work on a new disc. "Not Afraid" hit radio two weeks later and debuted at #1, and within weeks, [article id="1609675"]the album's cover leaked out[/article], generating more buzz. The grimmer "Won't Back Down" leaked out earlier this month and was used in commercials for the shooter video game "Call of Duty: Black Ops," and the second official single, the [article id="1641998"]Rihanna-assisted ballad "Love the Way You Lie,"[/article] has already hit #1 on the iTunes singles chart, with a video on the way.

By going with the pensive, midtempo [article id="1640846"]"Not Afraid"[/article] -- a serious-minded track in which Marshall Mathers, now 37, ponders his recent problems and tries to connect with fans who have also lived through hard times -- as the first single,

Entertainment Weekly correspondent Simon Vozick-Levinson said the rapper was signaling he'd turned a corner.

While the CD was expected to be big, at a time when even some major career stars are struggling to follow up hit albums (Christina Aguilera, John Mayer, Miley Cyrus), the more robust promotional push and the crucial first single are major factors. "When he put out the last album, people were just getting used to him being back after four or five years away, and he didn't do many interviews or appearances," Vozick-Levinson said. "But now he's out front, doing late-night talk shows and reminding people that he has a new album. He's put the work in, and it's paid off.

"But he also picked the right first single," he added. "Last time he came back with singles that didn't connect with people, and there was no clear idea of why he was back and what he was doing with his career. 'Not Afraid' was a smart choice, because it had the message that he's older and wiser, that he's grown up with his audience and he's more mature than in the past."

And while he's not sure the rest of the album lives up to that standard, Vozick-Levinson said the song clearly connected with Em's audience, and the not-so-hidden double meaning of the album title was perfect for these tenuous times. "He sent a message that he's connected with the audience in the way it is packaged too. *Recovery* has a double meaning about his own sobriety and his own recovery and also about the economic climate. People want to believe in the idea of things getting better and making a fresh start."

Eschewing the traditional violent, sophomoric between-song skits, tapping major stars like Pink and Rihanna and [article id="1642145"]opening up his stable of producers[/article] after years of relying on mentor Dr. Dre has also helped Eminem connect to a new generation of hip-hop fans who are used to hearing MCs like Drake and B.o.B chant and sing their choruses in between bars. Though he can't singlehandedly save the music biz, Vozick-Levinson said what's good for Eminem is ultimately good for an industry struggling to turn around a nearly decade-long slide in album sales.

"You can't transfer his success to other artists, because he's always been so unique," he said. "But it's good news for the industry that something like this can still happen and blockbuster sales and career artists still exist."

Were you surprised by Eminem's blockbuster debut? Let us know in the comments!